

Existing False Alarm Ordinance (Chapter 27)

Background

- In 1998, the City Council passed an ordinance with a goal of reducing the number of false alarms across the city. This was the second ordinance enacted by the City on this issue. The first ordinance, passed in 1987, was largely repealed in 1991.
- The NOPD enforced this ordinance through its False Alarm Reduction Unit until Hurricane Katrina. The unit was dismantled post-Katrina, in large part because at the time, the ordinance was seen by NOPD leadership as being unenforceable.

Overview of Existing False Alarm Ordinance

- Currently, the ordinance has an escalating fine structure for penalizing alarm system owners with false alarms:
 - No fine is issued for false alarms 1-3
 - \$25 fine for false alarms 4-5
 - \$50 fine for false alarms 6-7
 - \$75 fine for false alarms 8-9
 - Police response suspended for alarms 10 and above
- Most violations in the ordinance can only be adjudicated in Municipal Court and cannot be assessed as administrative fines. Only the false alarm fines can be assessed without a conviction.
- The ordinance requires alarm monitoring companies to make “best efforts” at verifying an alarm before requesting a police dispatch, but it does not define what actions constitute the best efforts standard.
- Appeals for fines under the ordinance can be made to the Alarm Appeals Board, an 11-member body composed of police, alarm industry members, and community members.

Why we need a new ordinance:

- Requiring a Municipal Court conviction for most fines makes it impractical to assess and collect fines under this ordinance.
- The ordinance does not require alarm monitoring companies to take responsibility for their systems, or even to make serious attempts at verifying alarms before requesting a police response.
- The false alarm penalty structure allows for 10 false alarms annually before police response is suspended. Only about 730 addresses in New Orleans had 10 false alarms or more in 2015, whereas 5,300 had 3 false alarms or more.
- Large parts of the ordinance, which regulate alarm installation companies, are now incompatible with state law, which was revised in 2007 to eliminate the City’s ability to regulate these companies. The new ordinance will bring the City’s code in line with state law.